

Intrusions : Looking after Aickman - Artists and the Uncanny 10th – 29th June 2014

Paula Rego, Anna Maria Pacheco, Dolores de Sade, Oona Grimes, Marcelle Hanselaar, Catherine Russell, Johanna Love,

"There's something wrong... There's something wrong with almost everything."
Hand in Glove, *Intrusions*, p .17 (Victor Gollancz, 1980)

Robert Aickman (1914 - 1981) wrote some of the strangest and most evocative of English ghost stories. His centenary is on the 27th June.

Aickman was an eccentric yet a reluctant man of the world. Educated at Highgate School, he trained but never practiced as an architect. He was a prolific writer and editor, and advocate of theatre, dance, and opera, but was best known for much of his life as the founder of the Inland Waterways Association. Now he is widely regarded as a master of the uncanny tale. In Aickman's forty eight 'Strange Stories' nothing is as it seems. They are characterised by a wanton sense of ambiguity and a frequent refusal to provide the reader with any kind of closure or resolution. Past intrudes onto present, inner on outer, time onto space: this is Aickman's world, an intuitive map of the psyche.

The exhibition 'Intrusions: Looking after Aickman' explores the world as a mysterious, sometimes disturbing place. Some of the artists echo Aickman's themes, some are informed by him, and some (in best Aickman manner) know nothing of him. As artists they explore, memory and myth, the everyday and the epic, and things that intrude.

Working in print and photography and largely in monochrome their work echoes both materially and in mood and resonance Aickman's themes. They hold in common the consistent exploration of the psychologically charged drama and the narrative of the dark underbelly of life.

Long admired in select circles, Aickman's writing is poised for critical reassessment through new editions of his written work, a documentary film on his life, and various other commemorative projects. Jeremy Dyson and Mark Gatiss of the 'League of Gentlemen' are committed advocates, and Dyson celebrated him in a Radio 4 programme 'The Unsettled Dust, the Strange Stories of Robert Aickman' on in December 2011 – it is still available to hear: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0184v2s>

The exhibition will be accompanied by a series of talks, readings; performances and events, there will also be a book area where the new editions of Aickman's work can be viewed.

He has. His influence extends from the dark comedy of 'The League of Gentlemen to

His story 'Wood' was one of Jeremy Dyson's selections in "The league of Gentlemen's Book of Precious Things' – and, strangely, Dyson wrote the libretto for an operetta based on Aickman's' story 'The Same Dog', commissioned by the Crouch End Chorus - perhaps the most unlikely theme for an operetta since Michael Nyman and Chris Rawlence tackled 'The Man who Mistook His Wife for a Hat'

Jeremy Dyson,, a committed advocate, also celebrated him in a Radio 4 programme on in December 2011 – it is still available to hear:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0184v2s>

June 2014 is his centenary.

Faber have a paper back re-release of his works scheduled for June 2014, in the meantime they are available through the print on demand 'Faber Finds', and more definitively and sensually in hardback from the Tartarus Press, whose books we will have on display throughout the exhibition.

Ray Russell, of Tartarus, is filming a documentary about his life and varied interests and various other commemorative and celebratory projects are being planned. The 2014 'World Fantasy Convention' in Washington DC will commemorate Aickman's Birth.

His first book of ghost stories was 'We Are For The Dark', written in collaboration with Elizabeth Jane Howard. They both stayed with the dark, but in separate ways.

He won a 'World Fantasy' award for a vampire story, yet defies genre snobbery. His literate, allusive, evocative, urbane style can keep sophisticated company, whilst his vision dissects it. He chaired the London Opera Society, said to be supported by the 'Fleming Family & Partners' Bank, and regularly wrote for a number of arts and ideas magazines of his time. It's a fine line to alk – he did not think much of "Jazz".

"Reading Robert Aickman is like watching a magician work, and very often I'm not even sure what the trick was" Neil Gaiman.

He went to school in Highgate

So,e of our artists echo Aickman, some are informed by him, some (in bext Aickman fashion) know nothing of him. All share a vision; the intrusion, the fascination; the initiation,; the return of the part of us we've lost.

Problems might be explained, demonstrated, but not solved.

The exhibition

6 contemporary artists, conjuring up the uncanny through print and photographs

Dolores De Sade
Marcelle Hanselaar
Tassie Russell

A display of books produced by the Tartarus Press; including works by Roebt Aickman on sale

The events

Tuesday 10 June Artist's private view
Saturday 14 June Open House

Sunday 15 June Artist's private view
Saturday 21 June Open House
Sunday 22 June 'Looking after Aickman' The new strange story (Writers & Artists talk)
Friday 27 June Robert Aickman's Birthday: readings and a recital
Saturday 28 June Open House
Sunday 29 June 'Looking after Aickman' The new strange story (Writers & Artists talk)

Dear Ray, I hope things have settled down for the family, and turned out OK – have you the mental space for considering the Aickman show now?
We've several artists in mind; all of high quality and reputation, and capable of being very strange... here's a flavour of the work.

We'll have the show up for almost 3 weeks – 10-29 June. It's in our house in Highgate – we turn the whole of the downstairs over to the work, and a large hallway and stairwell. People circulate freely, and it usually works very well. There's a big space at the back, where we serve drinks and food, and have talks and music.

It would be tremendous to have some books on display, and on sale. We could keep a stall running throughout (prints will be on sale too, so we could handle the sales when you're not here).

Private views become parties, and in the past we've had the artists talking. For Aickman, I'd also like to have some readings, and some talks about his work, and about new 'strange stories'. One ambition is to get Mike Harrison here, to do something or other, as I've long admired his work... and I've a few other ideas, but would value your input.

We have to decide the scale of what we put on, and if we have a day of events dedicated to RA around his birthday, how we'd advertise it, and what sort of numbers we might get. 20-30 we could handle at home. If more, we could book a venue elsewhere in Highgate, and offer people the chance to look at the work afterwards or on another day.

These are just some preliminary thoughts, it would be good to talk it through. When/where would be good to ring you?